(c) and (d) It is true that the imports of sugar into India have increased substantially. As per current import-export Policy, import of sugar is free and such imports can be made by private parties as per their assessment of the market.

(e) to (g) The government has increased duty on imports of sugar from 5% to 20% ad valorem plus Rs. 850 per tonne with effect from 13.1.99. In the Finance Bill 1999, the Government has proposed a customs duty of 25% ad valorem plus Rs. 850 per tonne on sugar.

Production of Cashew

2035. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government plan to change licensing laws so that corporate houses can be attracted to take up cashew production;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether Government propose to improve quality and exports of natural products, including tea and cashew nuts?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Government agencies are implementing various developmental schemes to enhance production, quality and export of natural products including tea and cashew nuts. Some of the steps taken include the provision of assistance for acquisition of latest packaging technology which fulfil international standards, participation in trade fairs/ exhibitions abroad, conducting publicity campaigns, organising Buyer-Seller Meets, promoting brands, etc. and assisting in the establishment of a quality testing laboratory in Question for cashew.

Steps to Promote Rubber Cultivation in Orisa

2036. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a vast scope to promote rubber cultivation in Orissa;

(b) if so, the steps taken in that direction during Eighth Plan;

(c) the assistance extended by the Central Government to the States for rubber plantation in Eighth Plan;

(d) the schemes proposed and fund earmarked for the purpose in the Ninth Plan; and

(e) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) The exploratory surveys conducted by the Rubber Board indicate that in about 200,000 ha., in identified pockets, agro-climatic conditions are moderately suitable for planting rubber in Orissa.

(b) In Orissa, the rubber Board has started raising block rubber plantation in land owned by tribal people in a limited extent. Upto the VIII Plan period, 277 ha. has been brought under rubber planting in Orissa. For development of rubber and to provide financial and extension support to the growers, the Board has set up offices in Dhankanal, Bhubneshwar, Naripada and Parlakhemundi in Orissa.

(c) to (e) The Central Govt. is not giving any financial assistance to the State Govts. for planting rubber. However, Government of India through Rubber Board has been implementing various ongoing schemes such as planting grant, cost of planting material, irrigation, smoke house construction, purchase of rubber sheeting roller, boundary protection material etc. for providing financial & extension support to the growers directly. In addition free training is also imparted to needy growers on all aspects of rubber cultivation.